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J320 Final

The Exploitation of Women in Mass Media; The Influence of the Viral App "TikTok"

The fast rise of the platform "TikTok" has revolutionized the way media in our society is consumed. TikTok is a platform that is based on creation and consumption. The rapid and continuous growth has fostered a culture of harassment and misogyny based on the prioritization of views, content, and revenue. TikTok is an algorithm-based app that prioritizes content likely to garner engagement, which often includes sexually suggestive and objectifying content featuring women. The media artifact that our group created is centered around the feelings and actions that women feel because of the pressure seen on the app. TikTok subconsciously alters the brains of many, especially women, which is why studying the effects is crucial.

Our media artifact is a video that illustrates a female consumer of the app TikTok and the effects and influences it holds on her. She is shown scrolling through the app and because of the infamous algorithm that causes consumers to become addicted, she only sees videos that make her feel like she needs to alter her appearance. This is an idea that many can relate to and we aimed to exemplify the subconscious thoughts that go into the notion of scrolling through the app. She then completely changes her appearance. She is shown putting on heavy makeup because she saw a popular user do the same. She removes her natural look, and puts on an outfit that shows her body, but still feels uncomfortable because she doesn't feel like she looks like all the other girls who are praised. She changes nearly everything about her appearance, but still

feels an extreme burden because she is not praised for it. The detrimental effects TikTok has on young women go on to support that the app leads to many issues for women. The exploitation of other women's bodies for a glimpse of fame causes many women to feel like they need to do the same. The concept of beauty has completely shifted. Women used to feel beautiful in their own skin and there was not an immense amount of competition. However, the fast-paced app that reaches many causes women's beauty to be defined by other people. The exploitation of these women's bodies that young girls watch every single day makes them feel like they need to do the same in order to be viewed as beautiful. Mass media, especially the booming app of TikTok, have completely altered women's perceptions of themselves and what is considered beautiful. In today's world, beauty is only determined by the number of likes one gets on a post and the number of people comparing themselves. The target audience for the video is women of any age. Women can all relate to the concept of comparing themselves to one another and this video directly demonstrates what that feels like. In specific, women who use TikTok can relate a lot more because of how specific the videos are. They cater to the issues of exploitation and subconsciously harm many women. The media artifact follows the story of a young girl who becomes trapped in this harmful cycle, and the effects it has on her perception of herself. The exploitation and the transformation she endures show the inequalities women face and the influence that the app has on the health and image of women today.

Mass media and viral social media platforms, specifically TikTok, harm many people and alter individuals' perceptions. In specific, young girls are the most targeted audience and deal with the majority of issues that social media may bring. Girls who regularly use social media are "six times more likely to develop body image issues" (Liu, 2). TikTok has surpassed any other social media platform and is now the most used app. With that, many issues have been revealed

and the app has turned into a place where insecurities and mental health deteriorates. The success of the app largely consists of the algorithm that draws consumers in. The algorithm follows a consumer's desires and what they like to see, and puts similar videos like that on their page, at all times. Due to this, the app has become extremely addicting and consumers get trapped in a cycle of watch habits. For young girls and women in general the app has shifted from a fun social media app to a place where they constantly compare themselves to what they see. A study done by Wang Congqiao collected responses from people who use TikTok. The results found that "five of the six participants said that in their daily lives, after watching TikTok videos, they would change their body image by learning fitness classes, controlling diet, learning how to wear, lose weight, and learn makeup techniques." Young girls on the app feel pressure to look like the other people they see and change their habits to fit in. When this is all these people see on their pages every single day, it is extremely hard to think a different way and stop the change from happening. Many people are watching others be successful and they begin conforming to what society claims is acceptable. However, TikTok also indirectly alters people's perceptions about body image through cyberbullying and comments on the app. TikTok has also been associated with harsh language and comments that are under certain images. People are able to comment on anything they want with no consequences. The same study by Congqiao showed that people feel pressure from their body image by glancing at the mean comments under videos that attack the creator. Comments about one's weight, appearance, or anything else largely play into the exploitation of women's bodies. The results of the study differed between men and women. When asked "are you worried about your body image," all men said no but two out of three women said yes. The effects of the app have been more extreme and distinct for the women users.

Our video opens with a collage of screen recordings of influential women on the booming app TikTok. Our video is a visible representation of how the exploitation of women on the app TikTok influences women in today's society. The exploitation of women on TikTok is a complex factor that involves the interplay of the foundation of our class; gender, media, and diversity. Gender plays a significant role in the issue addressed in our media artifact because women are disproportionately targeted for objectification and sexualization on the platform. Due in part to patriarchal norms and attitudes that perpetuate the belief that women's bodies exist for the pleasure and consumption of others. Another significant role that has fostered the objectification and sexualization of women on the platform is the praise and recognition women who are "influencers" receive. Media also plays a role in the exploitation of women on TikTok. In our media artifact, the woman is seen scrolling through her 'for you page' on TikTok. The 'for you page' is created using algorithms to prioritize content likely to garner engagement, which often includes sexually suggestive and objectifying content featuring women. Views on the platform incentivize creators to give in to the pressure to produce content that conforms to these norms to gain followers, views, and revenue. Diversity is a critical factor in this issue solely because it shapes the experiences of different groups of women on the platform. The exploitation of women on TikTok affects women from diverse backgrounds in unique ways. Women of color, for example, may face additional forms of harassment and discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. These intersecting forms of oppression make it even more difficult for women to navigate the platform safely.

Our media artifact highlights eleven different TikTok creators and a preview of one of their videos that have reached a large audience. It shows the effect that the exploitation of women's bodies on TikTok has on a girl at an influential age. It also can be hard to deliver the

adverse impact it may have on anyone the same age but with a different skin tone, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability. However, our video can be open for interpretation and be a starting point for conversations around intersectionality and how different forms of oppression intersect to impact women's experiences on social media platforms like TikTok. Our video allows the viewer to reflect on how the platform TikTok may have affected them as individuals, maybe even in a way they did not realize. A platform like TikTok features creators and influencers who all come from different backgrounds and have different sexual orientations and gender identities. A majority of influential TikTokers who become very famous very fast are white. TikTok has a significant number of influencers whose content is very similar. Still, the views and audiences reached when you are white and pretty are significantly greater than influencers who are women of color or anyone who identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community. The objectification and sexualization of women on TikTok can contribute to a culture of harassment and misogyny that can make women feel unsafe and devalued. This can erode their sense of self-worth and lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. It is especially harmful to the growing number of younger viewers who are still developing their sense of self and may be more vulnerable to the messages they see on TikTok.

Our media artifact and research goes on to show the true toxicity of the viral and booming app TikTok. The app has created an unrealistic societal expectation that women feel they need to follow which causes them to alter their appearance, diminishing their mental health and idea of self worth. There are many different issues that TikTok has created for today's world, but studying some of them allows consumers to be more mindful when using them.

Annotated Bibliography:

1. Liu, J. (n.d.). *The influence of the body image presented through TikTok trend-videos ...* Retrieved February 28, 2023, from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352556702_The_Influence_of_the_Body_Image_Presented_Through_TikTok_Trend-Videos_and_Its_Possible_Reasons/fulltext/60d006dd92851ca3acb7a1fa/The-Influence-of-the-Body-Image-PresentedThrough-TikTok-Trend-Videos-and-Its-Possible-Reasons.pdf.

Tik Tok is an app that influences many young people through trends and short videos. Young women and men use this app and are influenced by these videos. There is a statistic that shows girls who regularly use social media are 6 times more likely to have body image issues, and for boys they are 4 times more likely. This is a true, scary statistic because of how much influence social media has on people.

This article specifically talks about young children and body image, and more specifically how these young children are more inclined to stay on the app because they pick videos that are similar to the ones they have liked or watched in the past. Popular videos on Tik Tok influence the way you believe you should look like or how you think you should act and if you dont look like or act like these influencers then there is something wrong with you. For a user not to get roped into the negative influences on this app they need to explore and realize what software developers are trying to get them to do. Therefore, they need to learn to understand the algorithm that software developers use to keep young children and teens on the app.

2. Jaffar, B. (n.d.). *Living in a moment: Impact of Tik Tok on influencing younger generation* ... Retrieved February 28, 2023, from

https://www.amity.edu/gwalior/jccc/pdf/jccc-12-19-19.pdf.

Tik Tok is an up and coming app that has surpassed all of the other popular apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Youtube. This app has been seen to cause issues such as more child pornography, cyberbullying and parental disengagement. This article also looks at the background of this app and shows information about the company behind Tik Tok, Bytedance. They created this app to help people gain knowledge and be a productive hub, making their main goal to grow this company. This app is not only used or seen as bad, but it also has many good attributes. It helps with knowledge in young adults and children and even aids with charitable donations. It also allows people to show their talent within a short video and be able to express themselves in any way they wish. Although with all these good things Tik Tok can still be an unsafe space for young children, where they are educated on things that are inappropriate or are exposed to videos that should not be viewed. This app and the people behind it don't care about what children are being exposed to, they just care about numbers and influencers who are on the app as a whole. Cyberbullying throughout th app has led to mor serious matters, where parents have expressed that their child is now experiencing depression, or even worse has committed suicide. Many influencers on the app benefit from the money and followers that they gain through this network. In conclusion, this app needs to change in a way where there is more privacy, more digital security, and finally more consideration for community guidelines.

3. Perloff, R. M. (2014, May 29). *Social media effects on young women's body image concerns ... - springer*. Retrieved February 28, 2023, https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11199-014-0384-6.pdf.

The idea of the thin body is introduced in this article and proven to cause immense body issues in young women, due to it constantly being advertised on social media. This research is to

be conducted mostly in the US, Australia and the UK. It is seen that television is scarcely watched by young women, as they watch everything through a cellular device. The theme of this paper explains how social media remains one of the main causes for concern when it comes to eating disorders and body image. Women are more likely to care about what they look like on a daily basis than men, which leads them to be pressured to look a certain way and conform to these ideals that society has placed upon them. This paper mostly looks at Western societies and the body ideals that are shown in these areas. It is seen that even as early as the age of 3, "body perfect" and gender stereotypes have already begun in such societies. Mobile devices allow anything to be shared at any time with anyone while using their handheld device. This slim body image is shown on social media everywhere and is perceived to be the "norm" or the ideal body image of a woman. When this body image is promoted all over the internet, all women have this expectation to look like this, which typically results in eating disorders and unhealthy living. There is a figure within this reading that shows the connection between self gratification through social media, which then leads straight down to eating disorders, showing how much social media can impact self perception. This can also lead to the social comparison theory that it is natural for people to compare themselves to other people that might have a similar lifestyle and have similar definitions of themselves. The article sends a message at the end which shows that if there is more positive social media about body image it can change how people look at their bodies psychologically and even change their behavior and norms within society.

4. Congqiao, W *Tik Tok and Body Image of Young Adults…*

   Retrieved February 28, 2023 from,

   https://lnep.eliwise.ac/media/86d1ace08a75415ca4e3c5c821ebb403_cUJP3Om.pdf

Tik Tok is an app that has grown rapidly over the past few years, this app contains the creation of short videos posted by many users. Though this social media app is a fun enjoyable place, it can also be somewhere that a person gets lost within themselves. The app contains videos of people with perfect body figures, this leads young people to be influenced and compare themselves to the body image standard that Tik Tok upholds.

This article talks about the way they created a study by asking participants the way Tik Tok has affected them in their daily life. They asked a few questions to get the conversation to flow and had an open an hour long discussion about the way they felt. During the discussion they talked about the different ways that Tik Tok would affect their actions in everyday life. This affected them because of the body standard this app made them feel they should uphold. Some people may think this is a positive result, leading young people to get more active and eat healthier. Thus affecting their lifestyles in a good way to improve themselves. Although this can also be a very negative thing because of things like eating disorders, depression, anxiety, anorexia and more. As well as soon hating the way that they look and not feeling comfortable in their own skin. The article also shows us that females are more dramatically affected and will more likely anxiously change their appearance due to the app rather than males. Whilst they focus on changing their style, or getting more fit, women typically begin to tear themselves down instead.

5. Khattab, Mona. "Synching and Performing : Body (Re)-Presentation in the Short Video App Tik Tok." *OSUVA*, University of Vaasa,, 2 Jan. 2019, https://osuva.uwasa.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/10471/Osuva_Khattab_2019.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y.

Mona Khattab discusses the growing impact Social Networking Apps (SNAs) have in negotiating stereotypes of the body, mainly through skewed gendered images of femininity, as well as perceived notions of beauty as an indicator of sexual appeal. New digital platforms and social media networks portray a glorified image of what a woman's body should consistently look like, thus creating an unrealistic beauty standard that is impossible for women to fulfill. In turn, this creates "tension between the natural individuality of the body and its societal public visibility…leading to issues of self-representation" (Khattab).

This study seeks to analyze the role that Tik Tok plays in shaping stereotypes that rely on body visibility through the construction of gender-related notions. The analysis focuses mainly on the age group the app attracts, thus the data is directed towards adolescents, teens, and individuals in their early twenties. Central to this research is the notion of performativity of the body, linking the presentation of the female gender to the visual display of one's physique. Self-representation on Tik Tok is deemed 'sexy' when the user undergoes suggestive posing for videos, including seductive performances such as 'sexy gazing' and scantily dressed poses that all constitute a sexualized appearance. The study demonstrated that the mere framework of the app encourages thousands of individuals to perceive your appearance, which applies a pressure on users to 'perform their body' in a certain manner. Knowing their body is not only being watched, but critiqued, compared, and hypersexualized by other users has also proven to grow women's body image issues.

6. Korbani, A., & LaBrie, J. (2021). Toxic TikTok Trends. *Journal of Student Research*, *10*(2). https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v10i2.1687.

This article by Ava Korbani and Jessica LaBrie explores TikTok's enforcement of unrealistic and harmful beauty standards through the algorithm that the app employs. TikTok

operates on a system that caters to the interests of the consumer: if they watch and interact with media that promotes perfectionism in women, the more of that same media they will encounter as they use the app. This ultimately ends up flooding young women's "for you pages" with notions of perfectionism, and encourages them to compare themselves to impractical expectations. The article outlines a study that involved both qualitative and quantitative research, and ultimately suggests that TikTok eliminates user created trends that promote toxic discussion of women's body and beauty images.

7. Harper, B., & Tiggemann, M. (2007). The effect of thin ideal media images on women's self-objectification, mood, and body image. *Sex Roles*, *58*(9-10), 649–657. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9379-x.

This article by Brit Harper and Marika Tiggemann investigates objectification theory: where the sexual objectification of women in the media leads women to undergo self-objectification. They conducted a study that involved Australian women ages 18-35 viewing magazine advertisements that involved either thin-idealized women, a thin woman and a conventionally attractive man, or an advertisement with no people involved. The study ultimately showed that the women who viewed the advertisements involving objectified and idealized women showed more self-criticism, self-objectification, and anxiety regarding their physical appearances. The article explores how seeing one woman in a sexualized and objectified manner can lead female consumers to implement this gaze on themselves, leading them to harmfully criticize and objectify their own appearances.

8. Liu, J. (2021). The influence of the body image presented through TikTok trend-videos and its possible reasons. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210609.072.

This article by Jiyan Liu discusses the role that the media has in influencing society's ideals and self-image, and how TikTok negatively contributes to the discussion of female body image. The article explores a study that looks at different TikTok users and trends and touches on how the culture of TikTok trends ultimately encourages users, specifically females, to compare themselves to one another. The article shares that many young women have reported to use models and idealized social media figures as the basis for comparison to themselves, as the media is permeated with images of women that appeal to a Heterosexualized version of femininity. Liu suggests that taking negative action against these harmful notions that TikTok promotes could benefit society, as "roughly 18 million of the platform's daily users are believed to be under the age of 15" making them extremely impressionable (361).

9. Bavikatty, Andrea. *TikTok, Body Image, and Eating Behavior: An Analysis of College-Age Women*. Psychology Department, University of Michigan, 2022, https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/174735/abavikat.pdf?sequence=1.

Social Networking Sites (SNS) are most commonly used by teens and college-age women, many spending significant amounts of time on them daily. Previous studies have explored body image and disordered eating in relation to SNS engagement, but there has been little to no analysis that includes the short video platform, Tik Tok. Although fairly new seeing as it was created in 2016, Tik Tok quickly skyrocketed in popularity in 2019 and only continues to

expand. It utilizes an algorithm called the "For You Page", which provides users with an infinite amount of content that are similar to other videos they may have liked or interacted with. The article employed the example of a user liking a "what I eat in a day" video made by a model, causing a sequence of similar videos made by thin, glamorous women to be on their For You Page. Consequently, the objectification of a slim woman glamorizing her "healthy", low calorie meals to other female users who long to fit into this narrow societal beauty norm is very harmful. Such videos can not only be triggering to an individual struggling with disordered eating, but can also fuel one's body dysmorphia.

SNS and Tik Tok in particular contain aspects that emphasize the importance of maintaining one's physical appearance by encouraging the thin ideal that supposedly makes a woman more attractive. Due to the sparse amount of research including Tik Tok, this study aimed to examine Tik Tok's potential effects on female users body image and eating behavior. A method consisting of 145 participants was surveyed from November 2021 to January 2022. All included females ranged from 18 to 22 years old who were asked a series of questions through social media regarding diet advice, "fitspo" (fitness inspiration), and influencer content. Through this analysis, a connection was found between frequent viewing of content with a heavy emphasis on increased idealization of thinness, elevated body image dissatisfaction, and increased exhibition of ED symptomatology.

10. Grabe, Shelby, et al. "The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental and Correlational Studies." *APA PsycNet - American Psychological Association* , Library Electronic Resources & Services - UO Libraries, 2008, https://psycnet-apa-org.libproxy.uoregon.edu/fulltext/2008-04614-005.html.

According to this study, exposure to mass media depicting the thin-ideal body type may very well be linked to body image disturbance in women. Body dissatisfaction is a plague that continues to feed upon vulnerable American teens and young women. Nearly 50% of girls and undergraduate women reported being "dissatisfied" with their bodies. This notion is no coincidence; it has been connected to both physical and mental health problems that arise from the increasingly distorted image of the thin-ideal that is currently dominating the media. This ideal is "pervasive, with fashion models, cartoon characters, movie and television actresses, and Miss America Pageant winners all having become increasingly thinner over the past decades". Consequently, media aimed at adolescents, teens, and girls in their early twenties is full of extremely thin models whose look is unattainable to most.

A particular study this article discussed analyzed whether women felt worse about their bodies following exposure to thin models than after exposure to other types of images. The methodology consisted of the following: women were shown a series of magazine or television advertisements that contained either images of the thin-ideal (the experimental group) or media that was deemed neutral (the control group). The experimental group was asked to complete assessments of body image related constructs. A particular strength that was revealed through the use of this method was the potential of finding the relation between the media manipulation and women's body image. Results for this experiment clearly communicated that women who view thin-ideal images in the lab experienced lower body satisfaction in comparison to those who were shown neutral images. Thus, this growing body of experimental research indicates that exposure to content including overly thin models glamorizing an unhealthy lifestyle leads to increased body dissatisfaction as well as disordered eating in women and young girls.